



LIVING WITH AN AGING PARENT

One of the most significant transitions in our adult lives is the realization that an elder parent is in need of daily care. For most of us, parents have been our strongest source of security and wisdom, and the role reversal of caring for our caregiver can present daunting challenges on both the emotional and practical level.

When parents can no longer care for themselves, we are often faced with the question of whether to take them into our homes. We may have a strong desire to “give back” by caring for the person who so lovingly cared for and nurtured us. Inviting our aging parent into our household can provide an opportunity to forge a new relationship with them and to create a new sense of joy in the present. Our own children can gain the chance to learn and absorb family history. Our parents themselves may adjust more easily to daily care if that care is provided by a son or daughter who has a deep understanding of their background and needs.

For some, of course, living together with an aging parent may not be the best plan. As parents age, their needs evolve, and we may not be able to meet all of them. Moreover, the emotional toll of “adopting” a parent can be taxing to both sides, especially if our relationship with them has been strained in the past.

In addition, many of us are also caring for our children when our parents enter the time in their lives when they need additional care. Many of us have become the “sandwich generation,” struggling to care for both elderly parents and children. The stress can be great because of the very different nature of the kind of care our elderly parents and our children require.

POINTS TO PONDER

As part of your decision-making process, it may be helpful to consider some of the questions and challenges that you might face, should you decide to care for your elder in your home. For example:

- *Required Level of Care* – How much care does your parent need? Now or in the future, might she or he require daily assistance with bathing, medicine, personal hygiene and using the toilet? Are you comfortable providing this help? Can you locate, access and coordinate medical and other professional care as required?
- *Physical Space* – Is your home adequate and comfortable for a senior? Can your parent walk up stairs, or will a room on the ground floor be required? Will someone need to give up their room? Can you make the physical modifications that may be necessary?
- *Financial Factors* – What household expenses are likely to increase? Can your siblings – or your parent – contribute to the added cost? Will someone need to cut back on work hours?
- *Communication and Conflict Resolution* – How do you and your parent resolve conflict? How will you avoid returning to any historically negative communication patterns?
- *Your Parent's Social Life* – How much do you want to integrate your parent into family activities? To what extent will he or she want to remain socially independent?

MAKING IT WORK

If you have already made the decision to bring your elder into your home – or if you have already moved your parent in – here are some steps that can help to ease the transition:

- *Plan ahead, but be flexible.* Try to anticipate the needs of your newly expanded family and to plan accordingly. Understand that you cannot foresee or plan for every contingency. Be prepared to go with the flow. Put together a list of helpful resources (some are listed below), and do not be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

- **Take care of *yourself*.** Remember that being a caretaker increases your responsibility for your own physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Get enough rest and eat properly. Make time for leisure, and be sure you are getting the emotional support that you need. A respite from care is also very important.
- **Learn about aging.** Try to gain knowledge about the normal physical and behavioral changes that accompany the aging process, and learn to distinguish them from signs of disease. (Books and tapes, Web searches, and pamphlets from your healthcare provider are all excellent sources of information.)
- **Strive for balance, not perfection.** You cannot control everything, and you cannot always make everyone happy. Focus on the positive, keep a strong and healthy sense of humor, and take note of your successes.

RESOURCES

United States Administration on Aging (AoA): www.aoa.gov

Family Caregiver Alliance: www.caregiver.org

National Family Caregivers Association: www.nfca cares.org

AoA Eldercare Locator: www.eldercare.gov

Your EAP can also provide you with help accessing available resources and referrals to pre-screened elder care providers and facilities.

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for legal or financial advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.

Support for Family Caregivers

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a confidential service designed to promote your behavioral health and help you with the challenges of behavioral health and daily living challenges.

MHN's telephonic consultants can help you access available community and financial resources and referrals to pre-screened eldercare providers. We'll help identify needs and search our extensive directories to help you find the right care.

MHN can also provide an assessment, assistance and referral to additional services to help you cope with the emotional burden of caring for an aging loved one while maintaining your own life balance.

For details, call your EAP at:

(866) EAP-4SOC

(866) 327-4762

TDD callers, please dial (800) 327-0801

Or visit us online at:

www.eap4soc.mhn.com

(register with the access code "SOC")



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